

Chapter 14

Participation of German Business Enterprises in Educational Projects in the Field of Non–Formal and School Education

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ABSTRACT

Germany is known as a country of advanced technology and centuries-old traditions of both school and professional and university education. Obviously, this combination forms a special link between business and education. The chapter gives a brief overview of this interaction and considers one specific case of cooperation between industry and non-profit organization in educational projects. The authors write about one of the most significant German firms: the insurance company Allianz (Munich).

INTRODUCTION

When trying to understand what Germany is and how it works, one needs to understand just how hugely important economy is for German identity. Many observers have gone as far as making the case that it's impossible to fully comprehend the country

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-6951-0.ch014

and its culture without knowledge of the famed *Wirtschaftswunder* of the 1950s. The rapid economic recovery of the post-War period, understandably considered by contemporaries to be a miraculous development, was crucial in the formation of a renewed German identity under fundamentally changed circumstances, at least in West Germany. In general, economic developments came to dominate the political agenda on both sides of the Iron Curtain and contributed significantly to the formation of a novel sense of self for Germans in both parts of the country.

With these new parameters firmly in place by the early 1960s, it comes as no surprise that economic questions were also embedded prominently in the educational system. To this day, Germany continues to be identified with its uniquely successful system of professional education, known in German as *Duales System* (“dual system”). Here, trainees learn their future vocation right on site in the company that accepted them, while additional formal education is received at the so-called *Berufsschule* (“vocational school”). Both aspects are regarded as necessary elements of a successful training period, and needless to say, exams need to be passed in both segments.

It is obvious how closely interlinked economic and educational aspects are in this system: Education that aims to round out professional training is met with companies that happily fulfill an educational mandate.

In Bavaria, today one of Germany’s economic powerhouses, this nexus has proven to work particularly well. This is in no small part the result of the efforts of institutions that work at the seam point of business and education, such as the Bavarian Economy Association¹ or VBW (*Vereinigung der Bayerischen Wirtschaft*) that runs its own educational foundation. Institutions like the VBW supported the connection between education and businesses in a number of ways, ranging from their own educational research, to publications, extensive networking, and project grants – of which more than 50 were handed out in 2017 alone. Unlike universities, foundations like the VBW make it a point to have their research applied directly, e.g. by supporting internship fairs and other forums for businesses to meet potential trainees when the latter is still in school. Among the most prominent of recent grant recipients was a project that aimed specifically to raise girls’ interest in technical vocations in order to increase the number of female trainees in these fields. Other, more overarching goals are put forward as annual mottos; for instance, the main objective for 2016 was to support research in finding ways to reduce the number of vocational training dropouts.

It is obvious that the German professional-educational system in general and its Bavarian interpretation, in particular, depend on the ability of all stakeholders, from business owner to trainee, to display levels of leadership when the situation calls for it. The system fosters as well as necessitates independent thinking and interpersonal skills.

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